

Introduction

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As I write this Introduction, much of Australia is burning, tragedy abounds, the world watches with alarm from its global media. The bushfire smoke streams across 'the Ditch' to Aotearoa and pollutes their skies. At last our politicians react. Why does it take a massive calamity for politicians to respond with veracity? When will there be a similar sea-change political response to the Indigenous Housing 'problem'?

In this joint edition of *Parity* and *HousingWorks*, Alice Clarke 'notes advocacy and policy work is slow', whilst Smith and Jones observe that any improvement is 'neither linear nor continual'. They are correct. From my experience in the Aboriginal housing sector, it's like chipping away at a huge brick wall! This joint edition allows us to take stock of progress with a balanced mix of pieces on problem definitions, policy histories, planning strategies and visions.

I first became involved in Aboriginal housing in Australia in 1972, a time of radical transformation under the Whitlam Government and which heralded Aboriginal housing provision as a Commonwealth

responsibility in conjunction with the State Governments and newly formed community-based cooperatives and housing associations. The first national survey of Aboriginal housing needs was carried out at this time and the cost calculated of providing the necessary infrastructure provision in response to the backlog of national need. The gap remained as the years rolled on, the growth in population and associated new needs advancing ahead of the rate of housing provision. The measurement of the growing backlog became more accurate under the CHIP (Community Housing and Infrastructure Program) policy of ATSIC (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission) and the infrastructure needs were nationally measured and programmed as well; Housing management was also introduced as a valid area of expenditure. The gap remained however, and eventually ATSIC was abolished in 2004. The needs measurements were abandoned, the policy of mainstreaming prevailed and Indigenous needs then became masked as if the hundreds of communities were covered in a veil of thick smoke... not just a case of 'the impact of lost data on Indigenous Australian housing trajectories' (see contribution by Karimizandi et al herein), but more a case of the impact of no data! The cynics were of the view that government did not want to be reminded of what it was unable or unwilling to achieve. Yes, advocacy and policy work is slow!

Elsewhere I have written about a long-term dynamic trend in Australian Aboriginal housing policy which can be modelled as a pendulum swinging in an arc between 'mainstreaming' on one hand and 'culturally appropriate' housing delivery on the other with a number of hybrid blends of the two in between, which can be glossed as

'culturally sensitive mainstreaming'.¹ The swing of the policy pendulum signals shuffling between forward and backward progress — and the States have their pendulums too, but are only occasionally in unison, so progress is always irregular.

When Prime Minister Whitlam came to power and declared all Indigenous people must be urgently housed, Australia was emerging from the assimilation policy, our earliest attempt at mainstreaming. In New South Wales the 'salt and pepper' policy was in practice whereby Aboriginal families were placed in government rental housing, each house being selected to be positioned between white households. In the current joint edition there is a more recent reference (and criticism) to this policy known as 'pepper potting' in Aotearoa (see Durie piece).

In Australia's Whitlam era, multi-culturalism (cultural pluralism) was embraced and it became acceptable for architects to analyse and design in a culturally appropriate manner, recognising that different Aboriginal groups had distinct domiciliary needs and household behaviours that necessitated variance from the Anglo-Celtic norms of the working class family's house and behavioural patterns (one size fits all).² By the 1990s under ATSIC, the need for culturally appropriate housing management and the culturally-specific adaptation of mainstream tenancy agreements was progressing. Other parallel policies emanating from the early and mid 1970s were land rights, the outstation movement on to homelands and self-determination. The latter involved strengthening Aboriginal leadership, facilitating corporate bodies, and capacity-building such bodies in terms of governance and administration.

It is abundantly noticeable in this joint edition of *Parity* and *HousingWorks* that there are renewed calls and efforts for self-determination in both Australia and Aotearoa (in particular see pieces by Weber, Sinclair, Durie, Diamond, Aboriginal Community Housing). This is implicitly premised on principles of rights (see pieces by Sinclair, Rigby?) as well as cultural effectiveness in service delivery. However, this does not necessarily preclude collaborations and partnerships with government and non-government organisations (NGOs), once Indigenous governance and leadership has set direction, methods and/or targets for services (see Smith and Jones, Durie, Sinclair, Wood).

Returning to the late 1990s in Australia, the momentum of the culturally targeted policy development was slowed down to an almost static inertia (if not reversal in some places) with the pendulum swing to neo-liberalism policy under the Howard Government from 1996 to 2007. Economic hubs were declared and immigration to them, away from remote homelands encouraged. Homeland or outstation funding was shrunk and ceased in various jurisdictions. Indigenous Housing Association funding likewise shrunk and ceased. Aboriginal governance was terminated and badly eroded in various contexts (for example, see Weber's reference to the formation of super-shires as local governance initiatives were erased and mainstreaming occurred).

At the end of this era in Australia 'the Intervention' policy was abruptly imposed in 2007, catalysed by child sexual abuse in the Northern Territory (*Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act 2007*). Ten years later there remains angst and debate as to whether the elements of this intervention took prospects backwards or forwards in terms of human rights, housing and the overall achievement of a valid set of outcomes despite its intentions (see Weber's piece). The statistics mentioned or cited herein are indicative of the widening gaps across Indigenous social problems. For example, alarming figures are cited on the growing homelessness (See Weber, Samms, Kamizandi et al).



However, fortunately there was significant Indigenous leadership occurring in Aotearoa during Australia's neoliberalism period, culminating in reform initiatives in service delivery. Durie refers herein to the Maori health and education sectors leading, establishing and/or expanding cultural values and protocols. Although the Indigenous concept of Indigenous holistic health had been articulated and promoted since 1974 (the combined elements of physical, social, cultural, emotional and spiritual health), Māori nursing added the concept of 'cultural safety' which is increasingly gaining traction and broadening in application in both the New Zealand and Australian policy literature, and is further linked to the strengthening of cultural identity in relation to mental health. There is demand and debate for culturally safe places and spaces as well as service delivery (for example, see contributions by Wood, Smith and Jones, Sullivan and Doherty). The holistic health concept is being expanded to include connectedness to country³ and in parallel there are calls for homes and residential facilities to be 'on country' or 'positioned in the cultural landscape'. 'Well-being' and 'sustainability' (including 'cultural sustainability') are the other prevailing and intertwined policy constructs that have taken serious traction in the last 20 years across all disciplines and sectors, and are referred to in this joint edition of *Parity* and *HousingWorks*.

A serious limitation of all these policy concepts that necessitates serious acknowledgement is the lag in

transdisciplinary research to evaluate and confirm their claims for positive outcomes,⁴ and to give guidance on how leaders, practitioners and professionals can operationalise the policies in particular contexts, for example, how exactly does one design a culturally safe house, refuge, homeless centre or hospital ward for Indigenous people? What is the good practice happening and where is it happening? Are there holistic approaches happening that successfully deal with multiple determinants in the poverty cycle including health, education, employment, enterprise, governance as well as housing, and how are they constructed, from what foundations? (see Rigby, Weber).

Even combining housing research and health research with cross-cultural research demands complex sets of skills and methods, for example, there is little sound research that links Indigenous crowding to high rates of rheumatic and renal diseases, notwithstanding other determinant aspects of poverty and disadvantage (see Hall et al.⁵ and also Diamond herein). Little objective literature with an evidence base drawing on both qualitative and quantitative evidence exists. This is an ongoing essential role for forums such as *Parity* and *HousingWorks* to promote.

Endnotes

1. Milligan V, Phillips R, Easthorpe H, Liu E and Memmott P 2011, 'Urban social housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders: respecting culture and adapting services', *AHURI Final Report No.172*, Melbourne, p. 32.
2. O'Rourke T 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Domestic Architecture in Australia', in Grant E, Greenop K, Refiti A and Glenn D (eds) 2018, *The Handbook of Contemporary Indigenous Architecture*, Springer Nature, Singapore, Ch.2.
3. Ganesharajah C 2009, 'Indigenous Health and Wellbeing: the Importance of Country', *Native Title Research Report, No. 1/2009*, AIATSIS, Canberra.
4. Lutschini M 2005, 'Engaging with holism in Australian Aboriginal health policy — a review', *Australia and New Zealand Health Policy*, Vol.2, No.15.
5. Hall N, Memmott P, Barnes S, Redmond A, Go-Sam C, Nash D, Frank P and Simpson P 2020, *Pilyintinjiki Papalu-kari Murku Purrukaj-ji (the need for increased effective housing management to prevent acute sickness: A study of housing, crowding and hygiene-related infectious diseases in the Barkly region, Northern Territory University of Queensland and Anyinginyi Health Aboriginal Corporation, St Lucia and Tennant Creek (in press).*